

God's Grace

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Date: 28 December 2016

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[0 : 00] Now in a sense we have in this 24th chapter of Exodus, we have almost like a microcosm of the work of God's grace.

We'll know, no doubt, you'll be aware that in the preceding chapters, in chapter 20 in particular, God speaks to Moses or to the children of Israel from Mount Sinai.

And that is when the Lord utters what we now come to know as the Ten Commandments and what are similarly described as the Ten Commandments later on in Scripture.

For example, in chapter 34, verses 27 and 28, that is exactly how they are described. Write thou these words, for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.

And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He did neither eat bread nor drink water, and he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

[0 : 56] So before we get to the stage of the Lord writing in stone these Ten Commandments, before he writes, he speaks. And also we notice towards the beginning of this chapter that there are sacrifices offered to the Lord.

We have them. They rose up early in the morning, built an altar unto the hill, twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel which offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord.

But we don't have any specifics yet of what the Lord has required in terms of lambs or goats or oxen or anything. We don't even have a priesthood at this stage.

Moses is just sending particular young men who have chosen, whether for their sanctity or ability or whatever. These are just young men chosen for this purpose to actually do the, for want of a better word, butchering of the animals, to slaughter them for the sacrifice.

Moses gathers the blood and it is thus sprinkled as we read in this chapter. So before we have sacrifice even, before we have blood, we have God having spoken to his people first and foremost.

[2 : 13] Then we have the sacrifices, we have the tokens of God's own sacrifice. Now we know that the blood of bulls and goats and oxen of course doesn't take away sin, but it is the token, the symbol of that which does.

You know Hebrews 9, we have this plentifully throughout the chapter. 9 and verse 12, This is the blood of the covenant, you will notice, is sprinkled on the altar, on the book that is the scroll, no doubt, of which Moses has written.

Verse 4, you see, Moses wrote all the words of the Lord and rose up early in the morning, built an altar. And when he sprinkles the altar, sprinkles the blood on the altar, he took the book, the scroll of which he has written, of the covenant, read in the audience of the people.

He said, all that the Lord had said will we do and be obedient. Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord had made with you concerning all these words.

We have the spoken word, we have the written word, we have the sacrifice, we have the blood that binds together the symbolic presence of God, the altar and the people.

[4 : 04] And Hebrews spells out for us even more so in chapter 9, verse 19, he also mentions what Exodus omits, which is that he also sprinkles the book.

And he sprinkled both the book and all the people. So the written word is also sprinkled with the blood. So we have this symbol of life itself that is applied both to the symbolic presence of God, to the written word of God, to the people of God, and is taken from the sacrifice itself.

All these three, as it were, bound together with this blood of the covenant. God, his people, his spoken and written word thus bound together.

Now, of course, we know that the Lord Jesus Christ in the fullness of time becomes the word made flesh that dwelt among us. God's word is not simply written, it is brought alive afresh in the flesh and blood person of Jesus Christ.

Thus it is personified, thus it is represented, as it were, but in living, perfected form. Jesus said, he that hath seen me hath seen the Father. How sayest thou then?

[5 : 18] Show us the Father. So, now, we know that the blood, as we could, you know, take umpteen references, like Rickus and elsewhere, that the blood is the life. It is the symbolic life that flows through every creature that possesses it.

If you drain away the blood, they don't have any life. So the blood is the life. That's why it was sacred to the Lord. That's why people were not to eat the blood. It was to be poured out. It was to be offered, perhaps sprinkled on the altar.

Here, it was to be poured out. It wasn't to be consumed. It wasn't to form part, as it were, of the sacrifice at all. Because the life was sacred. It is this life which binds together God and his people and his word all bound up together.

But, you see, this time of year, of course, people very much remember the birth of Christ, or they ought to be. I suspect that much of what passes for celebration, supposedly, of his birth, doesn't actually feature the Lord Jesus in his infancy very much in it at all.

But, ideally, it is meant to be a remembering of his birth. And even if we don't choose to commemorate the festival itself, by the very turning of the year, it is numbered from his birth, from his coming into the world.

[6 : 35] Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. But, of course, the coming of Jesus in the flesh is simply in order. His being born is simply in order that he may die.

That his blood may be shed. God is a spirit, Jesus says. John 4. They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. A spirit cannot die. A spirit cannot shed blood.

Because it doesn't have blood to shed. In order to be able to die, God must become human. God must become man, which he does in the womb of the virgin.

He is born. He is brought up in Nazareth and so on. He becomes a baby. He becomes a boy. He becomes a man. He is brought into this world. He is born in order that he may die.

So that he may offer that ultimate sacrifice, which will bind together through his blood. God and his people.

[7 : 36] And bring his word bound up into that unity. Into that relationship. The blood is the life. Now we know that God's relationship with his people, it's about life.

God is the life of all creatures. Without him, they have no life. Not only is he the light of the world, he's the life of all things. He is the one that gives that spirit that life.

Now, God's desire is that men and women, boys and girls, be with him in that living relationship. It is the blood that is the life.

It is the blood that binds together the Lord and his people. This is his desire. And he is born into the world in order that his blood may be shed.

In order that his people be bound together with him. Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And rose up early in the morning. And built in an altar under the hill of twelve pillars according to twelve tribes of Israel.

[8 : 35] And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offering, sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in the basins. And half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.

And then he took the book of the covenant. And then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people. And bound together the same blood that goes on the altar goes on the people. Now, this life, then, that binds them together.

It is not itself the blood of God, the Son. That would come in the forms of time. But it is a testimony. It is a statement, a symbol of the covenant that binds them together.

How can we understand this in terms of, well, a lot of people this time of year, for example, they're travelling. A lot of people, including ourselves, benefit from family coming and going and so on.

And people will either be going on ferries or be going on planes or whatever. If you're organised, you'll have your ticket in advance, whether your plane ticket or your ferry ticket or whatever.

[9 : 39] You'll have your booking number and reference. And it means that as you're driving along, as you're coming to the ferry port or the airport or whatever, you'll have your tickets hand. You'll

have their little logo, whether it's Vly D or whether it's Cal Mac or whatever it will be.

And you've got your reference number and so on. It's all bought. It's paid for. It's there. The ticket, the symbol is there. These things, as long as you've got them in your glove compartment or in your pocket or whatever, you know you're sick.

You know that when they stop you at the barrier, you hand them over and you'll be let through. You've got your reference number. You've got your booking. You've got your ticket. It's all bought and paid for. It's all done.

If you turn up without the symbols of what is booked and bought and paid for, well, you might still get through with the check and double check. It's going to be more complicated. It's going to be more difficult. But the symbols will indicate the ticket.

The expression of it will indicate what has been done. Now, even if the thing that's symbolized by it, the journey, has not yet been made.

[10:38] You see, your ticket is not actually you're traveling on the minch or you're traveling through the air or whatever. Your ticket is not the flight. Your ticket is not the voyage or the sailing. But it gets you there.

It is that which expresses that it's bought and paid for and nothing is going to stop you making that journey. But in earthly terms, of course, we know the weather and the elements and so on can, of course, disrupt these things.

But in terms of our journey to be with the Lord, if our ticket is bought and paid for, if the price has been paid, if the symbols of it are there to be received, if, as it were, we might say in all reverence, the booking has been made on our behalf and in our name, then nothing can hold us back.

Nothing can stop us. But these symbols, the blood of the oxen in this instance on the altar and on the people and on the book and so on, and likewise all the Old Testament sacrifices, these are tokens, they are symbols, and if you like tickets, issued in advance of the actual journey.

So the blood of Christ that would be shed in the fullness of time is like the actual event itself. Your ticket enables you to receive the benefit of the journey.

[11:57] The symbols in advance enable the Lord's people to trust in that which shall be done in the fullness of time. And these tokens, when they are expressed by the Lord, when they are specified by the Lord, these were, when received in faith, sufficient for their time to enable the Lord's people to be taken to glory on the basis of what the Messiah, the Lamb of God, would do in the fullness of time.

It is not the blood of the oxen that satisfies. But insofar as it is an expression of that final, ultimate sacrifice which will be made, it is described thus as the blood of the covenant.

Now there is nothing powerful or efficacious, to use the long old fashioned word, in the blood of oxen.

There is nothing sufficient in the blood of lambs or goats or bulls, just as Hebrews tells us. But there is in the blood of Christ, there is that which is powerful.

This is the blood of the testament. Quoting again in Hebrews 9 verse 20, And without shedding of blood is no remission.

[13:35] There is no forgiveness without the shedding of the ultimate blood. Just as we can't make the journey lawfully without our ticket, so the Lord's people cannot make that journey successfully unless their price has been paid.

Unless their ticket has been bought and paid for by the ultimate sacrifice. This blood that is sprinkled in both directions, blood that is sprinkled on the altar, the symbolic presence of God, sprinkled on the book, sprinkled on the written word of God.

And of course Christ becomes the in flesh, the first personified word of God, and on the people. It's the same blood from the same sacrifice in all the different directions, binding them together.

When the Lord creates man, male and female, at the beginning, it is he who creates the blood that flows in Adam's veins and Eve's veins as well.

It is the Lord who creates us. Now, I don't know what the great deal about biochemistry or biology or whatever, but what I do know is that blood is an incredibly complex and potent thing.

[14:52] There is so much in the way of nutrients, and so much in the way of, you know, power in blood, you know, so much so that we can't move without it. An infusion of blood strengthens people and lifts them and so on.

And likewise, a loss of blood drains away your power and your strength. It's what takes all the nutrition and the goodness to all the different parts of your body, all the little capillaries and veins and tiny little vessels and so on, so much so that wherever you catch yourself, there's going to be blood coming out because it's covering almost the whole of you.

Without it, we can't live. God has created this blood. And since all nations are descended ultimately from Adam and through Eve, so likewise, it's true what he says in Acts 17, at verse 26 there, as Paul says to the Greeks, that he hath made of one blood all nations of men, for it had one in all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations, that they should seek the Lord, if happily they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.

For in him we live and move and have our being. As certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring. For as much then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like under gold or silver or stone, graven by art and by man's device.

Now you notice the thing there, the distinction. However beautiful or well constructed an idol might be, of stone or gold or silver or wood, however painted or gilded, these things are essentially lifeless.

[16:36] The wood at least would at one time have been a living thing, but it is only there because it's been chopped down, and because it's been barred and because it's made into something lifeless. There is nothing lifeful in stone, gold, silver, all of these things.

God is a living God, who has given to man a living power, a living force that he desires should be shared with him in time and for eternity.

The times of this ignorance, God will die, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day for which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, where all he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised them from the dead.

All made of one blood. In one sense, if we can say so reverently, the blood then which flowed in the veins of our Lord Jesus Christ, was that blood received from his humanity, ultimately descended from Adam.

God will, and all nations under heaven. His Godhead he receives from his Father. His humanity he receives from his Mother. So that he is holy God and holy man, perfect God and perfect man, that the blood that flows in his veins is human blood, ultimately descended from the one ancestor.

[18:03] God has made of one blood, all nations under heaven. And this then which he instructs Moses to write down.

Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, those up early in the morning. But although it's sprinkled with the blood and although it's sanctified, there is also this sense in which God is seeing and recognizing that although Moses is writing down, making sure he doesn't forget, everything that man does, however sanctified, however godly, however devout, will fade away.

And whether it's a parchment, or whether it's, you know, whatever kind of material they use for writing down in those days, it wasn't going to last.

God himself takes over then and says in this very chapter, I will give thee tables of stone and a law and commandments which I have written that thou mayest teach that.

Moses is doing his best to transcribe what God has said to him. But God is saying, look, what I give you isn't going to fade away. I am wet in stone and it will last and it will be there for a testimony.

[19:18] I myself will do it. I will give thee tables of stone. But notice that the laws and commands of God are prior to this stone, these stone tables.

God has already spoken in chapters 20 up to 24 here. He has already given it to Moses. There is already the life. There is already this, the blood of the covenant already shed.

It's not that the law is first and then the gospel is afterwards. The good news of God's living relationship with his people is prior to all these things.

There is God and life from God. There is that relationship that God desires with his people and the reason he gives his laws and commands and writes them in stone is so that he himself will express what he wants them to do.

Why does he want them to do it? To keep them close to himself so that they will be able to put into living expression their living relationship with them.

[20:22] I will give thee tables of stone and a law and commandments which I have written that thou mayest teach them. You see, the giving of these things, it's from the Lord.

It's God that gives them. Moses does his best to write it down, but ultimately the Lord says, I will write it down and I will write it in tables of stone. Now when we turn again, as we mentioned a moment ago in Exodus 34, at the end, it might seem a little as though perhaps to some doubt as to who wrote down that second tables of stone after Moses broke the first.

But if we go back to the beginning of chapter 34, we see what the Lord says there in chapter 34 of Exodus. The Lord said to Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first.

And I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables which thou breakest. Be ready in the morning and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai and present thyself there to me in the top of the mountain.

No man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mountains, neither let the flocks, nor the highest feet before that mount. And he, that's Moses, hewed two tables of stone like unto the first.

[21 : 33] And Moses rose up early in the morning and went up unto Mount Sinai as the Lord commanded him. And he took in his hand the two tables of stone and the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, and so on.

And what Moses comes down with is, as we saw there in verses 27 and 28 of Exodus 34, it is the dead commandment, as we now know that. But what the Lord has proclaimed to him at the outset is the name of the Lord.

It is that when the Lord appears when he stands with him on the mountain, he proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. In other words, the name of the Lord, the expression of the Lord, the character and identity of the Lord, is that which is encapsulated in the law, as he gives it, in the commandments, as he gives it.

And these are not, then, intended to be restrictions and do's and don'ts and ways of stopping people enjoying themselves or whatever. They are rather the living expression of what God is like, reduced to writing, that it be permanent and that it be better understood.

[23 : 02] The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth. How do we approach such a God as this, whose very character is being expressed?

Even from the mountain, this is how you do it. These are the laws and commands I would have you to follow. But they are not dead things in themselves.

They are preceded by the spoken word of God, by the sacrifice, by the blood of the covenant, by the life, by the promise of obedience, which, of course, the people do not keep.

They say, oh, yes, we'll be loyal, of course, we'll be faithful, yes, we'll do as God says, but, of course, they don't. Does that thereby mean that they are cast off from being his people?

Well, we know from the rest of the Old Testament, of course, that God constantly seeks his people to return to him. You know, we're all part of families in some way.

[23 : 59] We all have difficulties or swallows or disobedience or whatever, whether when we're children to our parents or vice versa when we're parents or grandparents or whatever the case may be. There's always tension somewhere in families or disagreements or disobediences or whatever.

But do those members of the same families cease to belong to those families? Do they stop being who they are? They're still bound together by the same blood as they always were before.

And there's always the opportunity to reach out and invite back into relationship, which is what the Lord keeps on doing. It is he who has written these tables of stone.

It is he who has accepted the tokens of that blood of the covenant. It is he who seeks that his people should come back to him.

Ultimately, of course, Jesus in the New Testament gives different symbols and tokens of the true sacrifice. As we know, the last supper, take for example, Luke 22, verse 20, he takes the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you.

[25 : 12] Now, again, going back to Hebrews 9, where the testament is, there must also be necessity, the death of the testator. Well, there isn't the death of the testator yet in Exodus 24. He hasn't died yet.

You know, all of us, if we're going to make our will and testament, we have to make it before we die. And it's good to know that it's there in the lawyer's office or in the filing cabinet or in the drawer or whatever.

We have to make the testament before we die. And all the things that are written are expressions of things that are important to us while we live and before our time comes.

But it only kicks in ultimately when we do die. This is what Hebrews 9 tells us. A testament is of force after men are dead.

Otherwise, it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth, because, of course, it could still be changed. But God doesn't change his testament. He doesn't change his word, but rather, he exceeds.

[26 : 15] And rather, he sort of overcomes, as it were. He overflows the grace that there was before. It goes beyond and above what was on offer before.

That's why it's called the New Testament. It's not that he is undoing the old. It is that he is enlarging it with the new. This New Testament of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as the title page of the New Testament says, implies that he is likewise the testator for the Old Testament.

But up until that point, he hasn't died. He hasn't given his life yet. He hasn't shed his own blood. But that day will come in the fullness of time.

You know, in heaven, in eternity, of course, time isn't measured in the same way. As Peter tells us, you know, with the Lord, a thousand years said, there's a watch in the night as yesterday when it has passed.

Now, of course, this is meant to be simply an expression of how different things are in eternity as to the hour in time. We can't nail these things down as though they're specific, but just for the sake of argument, arithmetically or mathematically, a watch of the night was either three hours or four hours depending on whether you used the Roman method or the old Jewish method, whether you divided the night up into three watches of four hours as the Hebrews did or four watches of three hours as the Romans did.

[27 : 47] So, we've got, sorry, I said the wrong thing there, whether it's three watches of four hours or four watches of three hours, twelve hours anyway. So, whether it's three hours or four hours, you know, the time between the giving of this law and the first sacrifices that are made here in Exodus 24 in the light of it, if we can say so reverently, if you can think in terms of God the Son in glory, beholding what Moses and the people of Israel are doing, in terms of the thousands of years that have yet to pass before he comes in the flesh, maybe one and a half, two thousand years, what have you, a thousand years of the watch at night, it's like looking at something happening in the morning and knowing that by mid-afternoon you have to be living it out.

It is as though Christ is viewing it from glory as Moses and the children of Israel are outworking all these things at Mount Sinai, knowing that by the heavenly equipment of mid-afternoon he has to be down there in the flesh.

He has to be living it out, he has to be actually going through the sacrifice itself, the crucifixion and all that he must endure. His blood will be being shed first of all in Gethsemane and then at the scourging post and then on the cross he will give it all.

And as he looks at the set of tokens, the animals that symbolize his own shedding of blood, he knows that in heavenly terms, it is not far away, it is that which must be endured, that which must be gone through.

And this is why he came, he is born to die, he has become flesh so that he can shed that blood, give that life, but it is that life, that blood, which binds together the Lord's people in one, with him, that is with God himself, as well as to one another, because he has made of one blood every nation under heaven.

[29 : 55] and it is that one blood that binds the Lord's people in every nation with himself. This is one reason why Moses sprinkles the altar, the symbol of God's presence himself.

He sprinkles the people, the people of God, he sprinkles the book, which is the written expression of God's living word. They are bound together in that one blood, that blood that ultimately runs through the veins, of our Savior, and is shed for us upon the cross.

The blood is the life. It is that life that the Lord desires us to have, life in all its fullness. But, of course, blood is only the symbol of life here upon earth.

There isn't blood to heaven. Resurrection bodies don't have blood in them. And if you see, I think of Jesus appearing to his disciples in Luke 24, he says, you know, handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as he see me have.

He doesn't see blood. No more blood in the resurrection bodies because the life is no longer from the blood. The life is from the Lord himself in glory. No need for blood in the resurrection bodies.

